

# Iowa Current Developments



June 2009, Iowa Current Developments  
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service  
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## A Message from the: State Conservationist



Rich Sims,  
State Conservationist

### Coping with STRESS

This year especially brought on different and new levels of stress for everyone in our agency. It doesn't mat-

ter your role in the agency, stress has touched you. So, the question is why are we experiencing this new stress and how can we deal with it?

The why question has multiple answers for me:

- The 2008 Farm Bill is bringing a new series of rules and statutes.
- The June 2008 rain events will be a workload issue for our state into 2010 and beyond.
- The audit

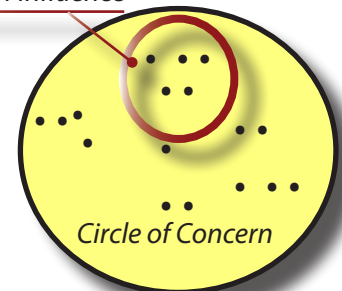
Each of these factors affect all of us. The question we need to ask ourselves is how can we deal with stress and still maintain our productivity? Here is my approach.

Imagine a large circle with a smaller circle inside it. Both circles are covered with little dots and each dot represents a concern. Let's say all the dots within the inner circle are items that you can positively affect so they are within your "circle of influence". You have no control over all the dots (concerns) in the larger circle so they are outside your "circle of concern".

Concentrate your energy and power on the concerns within your circle of influence. Remain aware of the other concerns, but do not spend your valuable time in these areas. Spend your time on items you have the power to change.

That is how I cope with stress.

Circle of Influence



Richard Sims



NRCS Chief Dave White is joined by partners and coworkers at an Earth Day celebration in Decorah. Pictured are Dave Gibney, Todd Duncan, Bob Vobora, Beth Rachut, Dave Beck, Mike

Praska, Shannon Hurd, White, Tamara Buitenwerf, LuAnn Rolling, Richard Sims, Lynn Elefson, Tom Duvel, Barb Hanson and Deb Ryun.

## Iowa Earth Day 2009: Visit by Chief Dave White

NRCS Chief David White participated in a Driftless Area Initiative Earth Day Event and Volunteer Week Celebration held at the Decorah Fish Hatchery April 24.

The event was sponsored by Northeast Iowa Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D), NRCS and local soil and water conservation districts.

State Conservationist Richard Sims, former NRCS Chief Paul Johnson and Chuck Gipp, director of the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's Division of Soil Conservation, also attended.

Lora Friest, Northeast Iowa RC&D coordinator, says the Decorah Earth Day event drew 160 people

and offered many outdoor activities. Participants could bicycle outdoor trails, learn to tie a fishing lure, fish for trout and see a nearby eagle's nest, she said.

The local "Moo Mobile" was on hand serving ice cream to participants said Friest.

The Driftless Area is a region noted for its deeply carved river valleys. While primarily in southwest Wisconsin, it includes areas of south-east Minnesota, northeast Iowa and northwest Illinois.



Laura Friest, Chuck Gipp, Dave Beck and Richard Sims greet NRCS Chief Dave White at Earth Day activities in Decorah.



## Backyard Conservation Conference: Held in Lenox

The eighth annual Adams County Backyard Conservation Conference was held March 28 at the elementary school in Lenox. Conference organizer Sheila O'Riley said the 160 participants learned new conservation techniques for backyards and small spaces with hands-on demonstrations and classroom presentations.

Presenters included O'Riley, NRCS employees Jennifer Dubendorf and Eric Sytsma.

The conference was sponsored by the Adams County Backyard Conservation Earth Team volunteers,



*Sheila O'Riley*

NRCS, Adams County Soil and Water Conservation District and Iowa State University Extension.

O'Riley estimates 200 Earth Team volunteer hours were spent planning and executing the conference this year. "This is very rewarding for us," said O'Riley. "We see volunteer hours spent this spring reaping many benefits this summer and fall in our area's gardens and flower beds. Additionally, our urban friends are now much more aware of the conservation practices farmers use and they understand how many of these same practices can be adopted for use in their own backyards."

## Soil Scientist Completes Desert Detail: Tom Champa

Soil Scientist Tom Champa recently completed a six-week winter detail to southern California to assist in the completion of an initial soil survey. He was assigned to an area in the Mojave Desert 120 miles east of Los Angeles next to the Joshua Tree National Park.

Champa says he dug 41 soil pits into the soft bedrock to complete 41 soils descriptions. He said in most areas he found the soils had a sand content of 80 to 95 percent and clay and silt content was less than 20 percent.

One of the more challenging areas he soil mapped was a landform similar to a pothole

or depression. "Digging in this area proved to be very difficult due to the high salt and sodium content of the soil," Champa said. "There was very little vegetation which makes it an ideal area for riding motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles."

"I enjoyed this detail," said Champa, "and I gained valuable work experience."

This is Champa's second detail to the American southwest. Two years ago he completed a detail south of the area he mapped in 2009.

There is a big push to complete initial soil surveys on all land, public and private says Champa.



*Tom Champa*

"Detailed soil surveys are needed to assist with wind erosion control planning and plan revegetation due to fires," he said.

## Craig's List Recruits: Earth Team Members

Jill Clothier, State Office Earth Team coordinator, may have scored a "national first." She is believed to be the first person to recruit an Earth Team volunteer using Craig's List, a free on-line classified advertising website.

Cathy Nava is proof.

Clothier frequently uses Craig's List to buy and sell personal items. "I noticed Craig's List had a volunteer section in it so I posted an ad looking for Earth Team volunteers. Within three weeks I had three responses. Cathy was the first and now she is on board helping us," Clothier said.

Nava, a married mother of six grown children and one adopted six-year-old, recently moved to Des Moines. She saw Clothier's ad and said she wanted something to do outside of the home. Nava contacted Clothier and signed up. Nava now helps Clothier three days a week.



*Jill Clothier and Earth Team volunteer Cathy Nava assemble training material.*

She says she is very happy with her volunteer work and being a member of NRCS' Earth Team.

Clothier is pleased, too. "I've bought and sold a lot of things on Craig's List," she said, "but getting Cathy signed up as a volunteer points to my Earth Team ad as my most successful one yet."

## Annual Golf Outing Announced

*The 2009 NRCS golf outing will be Friday, August 28, at Lake Panorama National Golf Course, Panorama.*

*For more information or to register, contact Deb Vonnahme at 712-792-1212.*

## DC Earns New Title: Battalion Commander

Malcom District Conservationist Greg Townley has a new title: battalion commander.

Townley, a lieutenant colonel, is a part-time soldier who recently took command of the Army Reserve's 1st Battalion of the 383rd Regiment of the 166th Aviation Brigade in a ceremony held March 8 at Fort Des Moines.



*Greg Townley*

He is now in charge of 128 full and part-time soldiers.

Townley's Army unit is responsible for training active, guard and reserve soldiers in the skills needed to survive and succeed in combat. They use field exercises and combat simulation drills to train their students under realistic conditions, says Townley.

Townley is a 25-year military veteran who lives in Prairie City.



*Nancy Antisdel and Julie McMichael mix up pudding to demonstrate the different layers of soil to students attending an annual conservation field day.*

## Adair County Holds Conservation Field Day

Greenfield Service Center staff recently hosted a conservation field day for 66 students from Nodaway Valley and Orient-Macksburg schools at the Adair County Fairgrounds.

The staff set up seven learning stations for the fifth graders on topics and activities that included pesticides, soils, a stream table, forestry, wildlife and water quality testing.

Kevin Kuhn, Adair County district conservationist, says one of kids' favorite stations taught wildlife identification and allowed the children to touch animal pelts. "Teacher and student feedback was very positive," said Kuhn. "The kids had a great time learn-

ing about conservation and our staff enjoyed working with the students. We look forward to this event every year."



*Ruth Holden explains a sight level to fifth graders during an annual Greenfield conservation student field day.*

## In the National Spotlight: Golden Hills RC&D

The National Catalyst, a newsletter for the National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils (NAR-CDC), recently featured a story on the Golden Hills Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) of Oakland. The story praised the cooperation and accomplishments of the nine-member RC&D board.

Shirley Frederiksen, the RC&D coordinator, said members of her board take one project and participate in that project. Projects include offering tax preparation and financial management assistance to low-income families, the Iowa ByWays Sustainability Project, the Hungry Canyon Alliance which fights gulley erosion, offering grape education workshops to revitalize Iowa's wine industry and supporting farmers markets.

The publication advised leaders of other RC&D councils to seek out the members and staff of Golden Hills RC&D saying, "They have remarkable stories to tell."



## Humboldt County: Teaches Earth Day Classes



Brian Tumey, Resource Conservationist in the Humboldt/Kossuth Management Unit, explains to fourth graders how to construct a bird feeder from a 20-ounce pop bottle.

Fourth graders in Humboldt County attended a local outdoor classroom event on Earth Day sponsored by Prairie Partners Resource Conservation and Development, NRCS and the Humboldt Soil and Water Conservation District.

Students cycled through six stations learning about conservation practices and their natural environment. They were able to build bird houses, plant trees and they helped release a rehabilitated screech owl into the wild.

Each of the 66 students was able to take home a wren house, bird feeder, and Concolor Fir tree, said District Conservationist Allison Orr.

This is the second year for this conservation classroom event.



## Montgomery County: Recruiting Middle School Students

Montgomery County District Conservationist Tom Burkhiser talks to Red Oak Middle School students at a held March 4 school sponsored career day. Burkhiser and Soil Conservationist Andrew Focht talked with 120 eighth graders about NRCS and NRCS career opportunities.

## Poweshiek County Hosts: **Women's Landowner Meeting**



Tina Cibula leads computer class at a Women Landowner Meeting held March 25 in Grinnell. The meeting was sponsored by the Poweshiek FSA and NRCS offices and featured presentations on subjects ranging from the corn suitability rating to using the Web Soil Survey.

Meleia Shelman, Cindy Gatlin and Christine Taliga also presented.

## District "Greeter": **Gets Producers' Attention**

West Pottawattamie Soil and Water Conservation District staff has a unique way of getting producers to pay attention to important messages: they pin notes on their "office greeter," a mannequin, and let visitors read them.

Tracy Bruun says its amazing to watch people spend 20 minutes in front of the mannequin they call Jeri reading every message posted on her. "There are times visitors will pay attention to Jeri, but not listen to us," she said.

"Staff dress Jeri in seasonally appropriate outfits and tape conservation messages to her clothing," said Dale DuVal, district conservationist. "She gets a lot of attention and we find her an effective way to communicate with producers."



Surrounding Jeri, the mannequin, are Matt Allen, private lands wildlife specialist; Tom Bottoms, soil conservation technician; Brett Bengard, state technician; Tracy Bruun, state secretary; Danelle Schmielau, Little Pony Creek Watershed project coordinator and Dale DuVal, district conservationist.

No one is sure where Jeri came from said Bruun. "We found her in the basement of our old building and brought her up to the office to celebrate a staff member's birthday," she said. "Jeri stayed put. Now she is a valued member of our conservation team."

"In fact," quips Bruun, "Dale DuVal is so pleased with her 24/7 dedication and perfect attendance that he offered to double Jeri's salary."

The mannequin reportedly refused to break away from her work to comment on DuVal's offer.



## Brothers Mark 120 Years of Service to NRCS

Richard Sims, state conservationist with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Des Moines, recently recognized the service of three brothers to soil conservation and the American people. "Lyle, Don and Brian Peterson helped countless farmers and landowners use conservation practices to improve their operations and the environment," said Sims. "They were leaders in our agency and embody the phrase 'helping people help the land.'"

The three brothers each served SCS and NRCS more than 40 years, accumulating more than 120 years of service.

The tribute to the brothers was triggered by the recent retirement of Brian Peterson, state grassland conservationist. Brian Peterson started with the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) as a soil scientist student trainee in 1968. He served as a soil conservationist and became a district conservationist, area grassland conservationist and ended his career as state grassland conservationist.

Brian retired in March 2009.



*Brothers Lyle, Don and Brian Peterson each served 40 years with NRCS.*

Lyle Peterson, the oldest of three brothers, started his career SCS in 1959. He served in a number of conservation positions retiring as district conservationist in the Council Bluffs office in 1998.

Lyle passed away February 2009.

Don Peterson began his SCS career as a student trainee in 1963. He served in a number of engineering positions and retired

in 2003 as Iowa environmental engineer specializing in animal waste management.

"I believe this to be a record of family service unmatched in the history of Iowa NRCS," said Sims. "I salute the Peterson brothers and I thank their family for sharing them with us."



## Changes In: NRCS Personnel

Name	Official Title	Grade	Effective Date	Nature of Action	Area	Location
Mier, Roberto	Resource Conservationist	11	3/29/09	Change in Title	A2	Grundy Center
Christian, Carolyn	Secretary	07	4/12/09	Promotion	SO	Des Moines
Dixon, Joseph	Resource Conservationist	09	4/12/09	Promotion	A5	Muscatine
Rachut, Elizabeth	Resource Conservationist	07	4/12/09	Promotion	A3	Osage
Green, Lawrence	Soil Conservationist	12	3/29/09	Reassignment	A2	Hampton

## Changes In: Partner Personnel

Name	Official Title	Effective Date	Nature of Action	Area	Location
Buckingham, Velvet	Environmental Specialist	10/17/2008	New Employee	A4	Corydon
Reece, Susie	Secretary	4/16/09	Retirement	A2	Iowa Falls
Doyle, Derek	Soil Technician	3/31/09	Separation	A4	Corning

### Current Developments Stories and Photos

*Please submit your Current Developments story ideas and photos to Laura Greiner, state public affairs specialist, at [laura.greiner@ia.usda.gov](mailto:laura.greiner@ia.usda.gov).*

*Current Developments is published six times a year. Past issues can be found at [www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/currentdevelopments.html](http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/currentdevelopments.html)*